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STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL  
TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

END OF YEAR REPORT  
1992-1993

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MASSACHUSETTS STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL  
1992-1993 END-OF-THE YEAR REPORT

Background

The Student Advisory Council to the Massachusetts Board of Education was established by Chapter 1009 of the Acts of 1971. The Student Advisory Council is comprised of eleven regional student advisory councils and one state student advisory council. Each high school student body in the Commonwealth elects two delegates to one of the eleven regional councils, which are then collapsed into six operating councils. The eleven regional councils, in turn, elect four delegates to the State Student Advisory Council. The state council elects three officers: a secretary, vice-chairperson, and a chairperson who serves as a voting member of the Board of Education, representing the council and the secondary school students of the Commonwealth. Department of Education staff provide technical assistance to this six hundred member Student Advisory Council.

The Student Advisory Council has been an effective body in advocating for increased student involvement in the decision making progress of the schools. Since its inception, the Council has accomplished the following:

- Increased student representation in decision-making through sponsoring enacted legislation which: (a) created Handbook Review Committees to School Committees; (b) created the Student Advisory Committees to School Committees (SAC to SC); (c) established the chair of the SAC to SC as an ex-officio member of the School Committee; (d) included student representation on school improvement councils; (e) provided a process for students and parents to create high school courses; and (f) established the opportunity for school committees to adopt student rights provisions.
- Advocated for student rights through developing and updating the publication, "Check It Out: A Student's Guide to Rights and Responsibilities," and training thousands of students on their rights and how to responsibly organize for them.
- Increased student voice on a wide range of educational affairs through representation on Department advisory boards and committees.



- Lobbied for quality public education through providing testimony at legislative hearings, educating students on budget issues, and organizing students at the state level and in local schools.

### Overview of the 1992-1993 Year

#### Introduction

Throughout the Education Reform initiatives, the Student Advisory Council has continued to enhance the quality of students' lives in providing for a safer school climate, knowledge and understanding of students' rights, education on important health and environmental issues, and continuing support for public education.

This report is a summary of a year's worth of work completed by Council members who volunteered their time to help improve the quality of education in this state.

The council applauds the work of the Board of Education, and all those involved with education and educational reform in their efforts to restore it to the high standards of excellence and equality that will prepare the students of the Commonwealth to succeed in this ever changing world.

#### Overall SSAC Goals

A goal of the Student Advisory Council has been to increase students' understanding of government, how legislative process works, and how students, as citizens in a democratic nation, can participate and make a difference. This goal has been readily achieved by the hands-on-experiences that the Council has provided; we have made a difference. The Legislative Task Force, in particular, has been very successful. To date, four bills filed by the Council have received favorable votes from the Legislature's Joint Committee on Education, Arts and Humanities.

Two other goals were established by the council at our leadership conference held nearly a year ago. The first was to continue to improve communication throughout the entire Student Advisory Council. This was aided by the Media Relations Task Force who produced three excellent and informative newsletters this past year. The second goal was to continue the unfinished business of previous councils. This included refiling several bills which will be described later in this paper.

#### RSAC Goals

Due to fiscal restraints and staffing constraints within the Department of Education, the regional councils were only able to meet quarterly. This is the second year that regional meetings were cut back in number. The leadership in the council worked



hard to maintain the effectiveness of the regional councils, and we feel positive about the work that was accomplished, however we strongly feel that our potential was not met. The Council is based upon a coalition of students that can meet regularly. Without the opportunity for regular meetings, our ability to serve as a democratic body that represents all of the high school students of the state is greatly comprised.

We are very proud and excited to announce that for the 1993-94 school year, the Regional Councils will now have seven (7) regular meetings. This will greatly increase the effectiveness of the entire SAC.

### Task Force Work

Over the past year, the State Council met monthly in five working task forces - Legislative, Social Issues, Student Rights, Media and Regional Chairs.

#### Legislative Task Force

The Legislative Task Force was responsible for sponsoring legislation and lobbying for other legislation that impacts students, such as education reform, health protection monies for school districts and sexual harassment and anti-violence legislation.

- Teacher Confidentiality. The Legislative Task Force succeeded in getting this bill voted favorably out of the Joint Committee on Education, Arts, and Humanities. This bill will allow students to communicate with teachers or other school personnel confidentially. This would be instrumental in strengthening lines of communication and student-teacher bonds. It is currently in the House, and the Legislative Task Force is launching a state-wide lobbying effort of letters, phone calls, and personal visits. We hope that the many legislators who initially supported this bill will continue their support, and help us to move this bill into law. This bill was sponsored by Representative Barbara Gardner.
- Equal Opportunity by Sexual Orientation. This bill would amend Chapter 622 to include sexual orientation as one of the classes of protection from discrimination for students in school settings. Current laws protect students based only on race, gender, and religion. There is considerable momentum and legislative support for this bill based on



current issues about sexual harassment policies for students, anti-violence initiatives and initiatives from the Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth. This bill is sponsored by Representative Byron Rushing. It was voted out of Committee favorably.

- Elimination of Academic Punishment. This bill was sponsored by Representative Pam Resor. Considerable testimony was collected from students, teachers, and many other people in education. This bill has been placed in study for further consideration from the Education Committee. This represents considerable progress by the Student Advisory Council since many of the concepts initiated by the bills are complex and challenging.
- Student Representation on School Committees. This bill would allow school committees the option of voting favorably to allow student representation and voting rights as a member of a local school committee. Currently students have non-voting status as school committee members. This bill would expand the role of student representation to equal status as school committee members. This bill would expand the role of student representation to equal status with other school committee members. The bill was filed by Representative Mark Roosevelt.
- AIDS/HIV Education. This bill was reported out favorably from the Joint Committee on Education, Arts and Humanities. It is a proposal to amend Chapter 71, section 1 to include AIDS/HIV prevention education as a recommended topic in the teaching of health education. The council continues to view AIDS/HIV prevention education as a state-wide priority that has serious implications for students. This bill was sponsored by Representative Gardner. The Student Advisory Council will continue to lobby for passage of this bill.

#### Social Issues Task Force

This year's Social Issues Task Force has focused on issues of AIDS/HIV and discrimination in a variety of ways.



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Last year's Social Issues Task Force created a pamphlet entitled, "Do You Want Condoms Made Available in Your School?"; this year's task force has worked on promoting and distributing the pamphlet. To do this, we distributed pamphlets to all incoming Regional Student Advisory Council members and mailed them to all Student Council Presidents in Massachusetts. The pamphlet was also made available at the AIDS Action Committee's Conference on AIDS/HIV Prevention Education and Condom Availability held in October, 1992 and attended by nearly 400 students from across the state.

In addition, the pamphlet was presented at a student rally at the State House on education reform in December sponsored by SAC. At this time, the Task Force also lobbied legislators to support a SAC bill which would require that AIDS/HIV prevention education be included in comprehensive health education curricula in public schools.

Furthermore, members of the Task Force testified in front of the Joint Committee on Education to support another SAC bill that would prohibit discrimination based on sexual education in schools.

The major goal of this year's Social Issues Task Force was to produce a conference for youth on racism, sexism and homophobia. The Task Force collaborated with the Massachusetts Student Alliance Against Racism and Violence in order to complete this task. The conference, which was held on March 16, 1993 was attended by 250 students and staff. The keynote speaker was former Representative Barbara Hildt. All of the workshops were co-led by members of the Social Issues Task Force and members of the Student Alliance.

Finally, the Task Force will promote the eighth annual AIDS Action Committee Walk for Life to be held on June 6, 1993. This goal will be accomplished by members of the Task Force encouraging participation from Regional Student Advisory Council members and other students from across the state.

All in all we believe that the Social Issue Task Force has had a most successful year!

#### Student Rights Task Force

Throughout the year the Student Rights Task Force has completed several of its original goals. Our first goal was to distribute Check It Out, A Guide to Rights and Responsibilities for Massachusetts Students. However, we felt that distribution was not enough. Educating principals, student leaders, and our own regional council members became a top priority. There was a letter sent out to principals and student leaders explaining what Check It Out is and what it has been designed to do (Check It Out was created to give students a resource to find justice for themselves and others, while providing explanations that show the



need for responsibility). Hundreds of schools received packets containing: 2 separate letters (student leader, principal), 2 copies of Check It Out, and an order form for additional copies of Check It Out. Educating regional council members was also necessary. The Students Rights Task Force divided and outlined Check It Out and used shorter explanations to demonstrate Check It Out and to bring out important points.

Our Task Force is in the process of revising The Student's Guide to Special Education. We hope to complete this project with the involvement of next year's Student Rights Task Force.

### Media Relations

This year Media Relations was able to successfully expand our accomplishments. We produced three issues of Palatyi and have laid the groundwork for a fourth. Each issue contained the standard articles focusing on issues affecting students; Dear Donmeistor, a "Dear Abby" type column addressing student questions about their rights; updates on SAC activities; plus new columns which included interviews with students who have made a difference in their schools and student poetry.

Since we have changed our name to the Media Relations Task Force, we have broadened our base to include press releases and general promotion of State Student Advisory Council activities and accomplishments. Next year we would suggest a larger staff who understands and meets established deadlines. We also suggest that next year's staff include more entertaining items in the Palatyi, such as cartoons and comic strips.

### Regional Council

Each regional council met four times throughout the year. In each meeting, law-related education and students rights have continued to be a substantial part of the agenda. Councils advise and review the initiatives of the state council and contribute a voice in the direction of state council priorities. Councils also serve as important lobbying bodies for State Council-sponsored legislation.

This year, violence in schools was a top concern for many council members. The regional meetings gave students an opportunity to voice their views, express their frustrations, and collaborate together to find a solution. It was a positive experience for all involved.

These meetings continue to be effective opportunities for training students in their roles as student leaders, and increasing student participation in taking greater responsibility for their education.

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